



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

October 31, 2014

Joan McLaughlin
Commissioner
National Center for Special Education Research
Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education

Thomas Brock
Commissioner
National Center for Education Research
Institute of Education Sciences
U.S. Department of Education

Dear Commissioner McLaughlin and Commissioner Brock:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Education Task Force, we are pleased to provide feedback regarding the future work of the National Center for Education Research (NCER) and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER).

CCD has long advocated for a strong, well-funded federal research agency focused on addressing the needs of America's six million infants, toddlers and students with disabilities. Evidence-based interventions and strategies supporting the developmental, academic and social-emotional outcomes of children with disabilities is critical to developing effective interventions, teaching practices and strategies for learning that are invaluable resources to families, educators and communities.

We would be remiss if we did not address the significant funding cut incurred by the National Center for Special Education in 2011 and the failure to recoup this loss. As you are well aware, the investment in special education research is wholly inadequate to meet the needs of children and youth with disabilities, their families and the educators who work on their behalf. With the many changes occurring in our schools through the adoption of college and career ready standards, new assessments, and numerous other initiatives, this is a critical time to increase the investment in special education research.

As we move toward an environment of increasing inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, we must have a solid understanding of how to best serve all students.

With that in mind, we are pleased that NCER and NCSER have issued this joint call for stakeholder feedback.

Characteristics of Studies That Have Been Influential on Policy and Practice

Over the last decade, NCER and NCSER have produced research that has informed a variety of education practices and helped shape policy across the nation. We believe research projects with the following characteristics have had the greatest impact on influencing policy and practice:

- **Longitudinal studies** such as the National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study, the Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study, and the National Transitional Longitudinal Study, have allowed the research community to provide families, educators, and policymakers with critical information about a variety of issues over an extended period of time.
- **Single case design studies/single subject design** have provided additional opportunities to focus on relevant research questions, particularly related to children with disabilities, and have this research recognized as being of the highest-quality.
- **Rigor** of the research design and oversight has resulted in a greater recognition of the valuable role IES's research can have on various stakeholders.
- **Relevancy** has been critical to addressing persistent and timely issues, such as extensive research on Response to Intervention, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and Universal Design for Learning.

Critical Problems/Issues Where New Research is Needed

While NCER and NCSER have supported numerous high-quality research projects, we believe the following topics should be prioritized:

- **Development of research syntheses/meta-analyses:** IES could make a significant contribution to the education field through the development of research collections that provide a complete picture of the IES supported research in a particular area. To have maximum impact, these collections could include research originating from any of the IES centers – or other high-quality research studies conducted by entities other than IES – and be translated into easy-to-understand terms that families, educators and policymakers could digest.
- **Systems issues:** While it is important for IES to focus on researching interventions, we also believe IES should broaden its research capacity and priorities to focus on key systems issues that directly impact outcomes of children with disabilities. Such systems issues may include: the impact of budget cuts on eligibility for services (both IDEA Part B and C), reasons for the decreasing number of children identified as having a disability, impact of early intervention on educational outcomes, collaborative teaching models, knowledge translation to reach the classroom level, the role of specialized instructional support personnel and their impact on student achievement, impact of various education reform efforts (i.e. college and career ready standards and assessments) on students with disabilities, effectiveness of digital game-based instructional design, and methods to scale up research.
- **Elements that support success for children and youth with disabilities:** Traditionally research has focused on matching a deficit with an intervention. While this approach has

yielded important information, IES should also support research priorities that promote understanding about the factors, elements, interventions, and other indicators that support positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

- **Cultural competency:** IES should reinforce the important role of cultural competency through its grant process by emphasizing diversity in the grant applications.
- **Students with disabilities in general education settings:** With the IDEA requirement that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment, numerous research questions exist that demand closer investigation to assist both general and special educators in providing students with a high-quality education.
- **Increase and sustained focus on low incidence and/or significant disabilities:** Research dedicated to these populations has decreased over the past few years; there should be a dedicated commitment to this population.
- **Focus research on a broader interpretation of “outcomes”:** Traditionally IES-supported research has focused on improving *outcomes* as being primarily academic outcomes. We encourage IES to adopt a broader working definition of outcomes to include other domains such as: social-emotional outcomes, learning ecosystems, and family engagement.
- **Innovative approaches to education:** IES should support research that addresses personalized learning systems and their impact on students with disabilities.
- **Connection to Educator Preparation:** IES should initiate research to better understand how to prepare educators – including general and special education teachers and specialized instructional support personnel – to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- **Alignment with state/district trends in technical assistance:** IES should be aware of trends in technical assistance requested by states and school districts to better identify their practical needs and determine how IES’s research can contribute to a solution.

Importance of Targeting NCER and NCSER Funding to Drive Improvement

We recognize both NCER and NCSER are chronically underfunded which impedes their ability to achieve their missions. CCD believes focusing funding as outlined below will have the greatest impact with such limited investments:

- **Promote collaboration between NCER and NCSER to encourage complementary research agendas:** IES should work to support a research agenda that maintains unique priorities of each Center while creating joint lines of research. The prevailing practice across the field of distinguishing research for and about general education students from research for and about students with disabilities is unproductive. Indeed, the existence of general-education and special- education silos in the research community contributes to this division within the school community.
- **Award a broader mix of grants among the various goals of the goal structure:** Each goal within the goal structure represents an important contribution to the stakeholders who consume the research. Therefore greater emphasis should be placed on soliciting and funding grants for each individual goal.
- **Greater transparency of IES program officer analyses:** It is our understanding that annually IES program officers provide an analysis of research in a particular area and ideas for future research. By providing this information to the public, stakeholders would have a better understanding of the status of the research and how that research will contribute to knowledge that will drive a broad range of improvements.

- **Summary of completed grant findings:** Stakeholders would benefit significantly from the addition of findings to the abstracts of completed grant projects. Currently, only the abstract which outlines the research grant is available online, even in situations where the research was completed years ago. Instead, it would be helpful to have a summary of the findings from the completed grant. This information may help address the research-to-practice gap.
- **Collaboration with the broader research community:** IES should think creatively about how to partner or collaborate with the broader research community on a shared research agenda or expanding upon research traditionally viewed as outside the scope of IES. Examples may include collaboration to investigate learning that occurs outside of the classroom, innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and brain-based research.
- **Include research based in systems reform:** Traditionally IES-supported research has focused on specific interventions, which has yielded important information and findings. However, it would be equally as valuable to have dedicated research focused on systems-based issues, such as scaling up successful interventions.
- **Promote training for new researchers:** Building and supporting the pipeline of new researchers is critical to meeting the research needs of the education field. IES should work to promote and nurture new researchers through a variety of initiatives, including technical assistance, guidance, and efforts to address and recognize the impact of the ongoing shortage of special education faculty at institutions of higher education on developing future researchers in special education.
- **Regular engagement with relevant organizations:** To increase public awareness about the research supported by IES, it would be helpful to have regular opportunities to participate in input sessions to provide timely feedback.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on how to ensure that both NCER and NCSER continue to provide positive contributions and advance research to support all children.

Sincerely,

ACCSES
 American Dance Therapy Association
 American Music Therapy Association
 American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
 Association of University Centers on Disabilities
 Autism Self Advocacy Network
 Brain Injury Association of America
 Council for Exceptional Children
 Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
 Easter Seals
 Higher Education Consortium of Special Education
 Institute for Educational Leadership
 Learning Disabilities Association of America
 National Association of School Psychologists
 National Center for Learning Disabilities

National Disability Rights Network
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
TASH
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
The Arc
The Advocacy Institute
School Social Work Association of America

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. Since 1973, the CCD has advocated on behalf of people of all ages with physical and mental disabilities and their families. CCD has worked to achieve federal legislation and regulations that assure that the 54 million children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream of society. For additional information, please contact:

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